

“Changing Church for a Changing World”

Introduction by Canon John Holbrook (Wimborne Deanery & Bishops' Council)

It's really exciting to start this new Synod with a success story in which Synod played a major part.

A few weeks ago, I found myself standing outside the Minster Church in Heidenheim in Bavaria, underneath a statue of one of Germany's most revered saints, St Wallburga. She was a member of the Wimborne religious community, who in 752, travelled across the North Sea with her brothers and between 10 and 20 others to share in St Boniface's mission to Germany. Her role was to be the founding abbess of new community at Heidenheim, where there is still a thriving Christian Church.

The statue is shaped rather like a giant clothes peg, but it is beautiful! At her feet there is a frieze showing scenes from her life; one depicts a small boat in a big sea, with the three saints and seven little figures. When I saw it, I was deeply moved, to think that those ten people were my predecessors in faith, my hosts' predecessors in faith, our predecessors in faith.

Our diocese has a great track record over 13 centuries of hearing God's call and, in Bishop David's words, “leaving our places of safety and pitching our tent where God is at work”.

However I was disappointed to discover that Heidenheim is NOT the place where they brew Heineken! Do you remember the adverts? “It refreshes the parts other beers don't reach.” Which brings me to ‘Fresh Expressions’.

Archbishop Rowan has said that supporting ‘Fresh Expressions’ is the single most important thing within the Church of England for which he wants to be remembered. He explains – “traditional worship is exactly what it should be for many people, transforming, life giving, joyful, but we must be generous enough to recognise that it doesn't speak to everyone. Lots of people don't start there and we need to go where people are and find new ways of assembling people around the presence of Jesus.”

The pattern is grounded in the model of Jesus himself, whose incarnation was what one thinker (Karl Barth) has called a “journey into a far country”, who left “his place of safety” and as St John actually says in the Christmas gospel, “pitched his tent among us”.

During my conversations in Germany someone asked the question; “Why did the Wimborne sisters travel so far? Why not stop in Northern Germany which was more convenient?” There are two answers: 1. They were Saxons trying to reach other Saxons, so they had to go where the people were. 2. They were following a call regardless of convenience. If they had wanted to go somewhere convenient, they could have gone to Blandford!

We cannot “carry on at our convenience”. We have to go where people are. Over the past few years we have been doing just that. In this diocese we are blessed by people of imagination who can see new possibilities. We are blessed by leaders of imagination with the courage to nurture those pioneers. We are blessed by a Synod of imagination willing to make money available for new work.

It has been my privilege, on your behalf, through the Aldhelm Fund, to see many of these sometimes fragile new flowers blooming – a holiday club, quiet space, family fun day, civic chaplaincy, art exhibition, community evangelist, church planting, street

pastors, passion play, messy church, rural youth groups, steam fair ministry, summer tent mission, prison ministry, pilgrimages, reading club, pub-based enquirers course, a praise party and much more. And three larger pioneer projects for which Synod found the money, approved last summer and which I am pleased to present now.